

Blood Lead Testing is Required Before Starting Kindergarten



Since 2008, school officials assist the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) to ensure that Iowa children entering kindergarten have a valid blood lead test. You will be notified if your child needs a test. If your child already has had a blood lead test, an additional test is not needed.

This is how it all works. Schools provide a list of children enrolled in kindergarten to IDPH and the department checks to see if your child has received a blood lead test (physicians and laboratories report all tests to IDPH.) IDPH will let the school know if IDPH does not have a record of a blood lead test of your child.

Who pays for the testing?

When your child is tested, many insurance plans including Medicaid and *hawk-i* will cover it. If you don't have a way to pay for this test, contact IDPH at (800) 972-2026 or your local Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program for assistance finding ways to get a blood lead test for your child.

Blood Lead testing is an important way to check your child's health

Childhood lead poisoning is a serious problem in Iowa. Lead poisoning causes learning disabilities and could affect your child's school performance.

Lead poisoning is commonly caused by lead-based paint found in homes built before 1960. Iowa has a large number of homes in Iowa, both in urban and rural areas, built before 1960.

Children can become lead-poisoned by:

- putting lead-based paint chips in their mouths.
- putting dusty or dirty hands, toys, in their mouths.

- playing in dirt or a sandbox near an old building or where an old building was torn down.
- breathing in dust from lead-based paint.

Lead-poisoned children may have learning problems when they start school. Children with very high lead levels may have severe brain damage or even die. Most children with lead poisoning do not look sick. The only way to tell for certain if your child is lead-poisoned is to have their blood tested. The blood sample is collected by a simple finger prick.

Lead-poisoning symptoms may include:

- being easily excited.
- having problems paying attention.
- complaining of stomach aches and headaches.
- being more tired than usual.

IDPH and our health partners strongly recommend blood lead testing. However, we understand this testing may go against your religious beliefs. If this is the case, there is a form that parents or guardians must fill out and have notarized. This form will be filed with your child's school, and the school may forward the form to the IDPH. This religious exemption form is available at the IDPH website at the following address:

<http://idph.iowa.gov/Portals/1/userfiles/106/ReligiousExemptionCertificate.pdf>.

There is also a low risk exemption that is granted only by IDPH. If you believe your child is at very low risk for lead poisoning, contact Stuart Schmitz, State Toxicologist, at IDPH. He will determine if a “very low risk” exemption will be granted to your child. He can be contacted at (515) 281-8707 or at his email address: stuart.schmitz@idph.iowa.gov.

For more information about lead poisoning and how you can protect your children, contact the Iowa Department of Public Health at (800) 972-2026 or visit our website <http://idph.iowa.gov/lpp/blood-lead-testing>.

